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ABSTRACT

This study describes two phases of the planning of a professional development center for teaching and teacher education, utilizing a reflective and collaborative inquiry approach. Two themes guided the study: (1) the dissonance between teacher education and teaching; and (2) preparation of teachers to respond to the changing population of children and families. Participants in the study were school district and school administrators, university faculty, and classroom teachers. Data were collected from narrative records of planning and review sessions, collections of planning materials and resulting program descriptions, and participant journals. The major result of phase one was the development of a preservice and inservice program entitled "Classrooms as Families," which addresses the social and support needs of children, teachers, and families. Phase two findings suggest that university and school district faculties provide models of practice for preservice teachers; teacher education should increase the study of family systems, communication, conflict resolution, and time and stress management. Through reflective and collaborative inquiry, both school personnel and university faculty became significant contributors to the professionalization of teaching. (LL)

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UNIVERSITY/SCHOOL DISTRICT REFLECTION IN TEACHER EDUCATION: A COLLABORATIVE INQUIRY APPROACH

(The Portland State University/East Multnomah County Project: "Classrooms As Families" Teacher Education Program)

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University/School District Reflection in Teacher Education:
A Collaborative Inquiry Approach

Introduction

A critical condition for the renewal of teacher education is authentic collaboration between schools of education and schools in the preparation of teachers. Goodlad (1991) recommends "a collaboration where the schools are equal partners" and where "schools and teacher training institutions are joined together in a common mission." Many professionals like Goodlad have come to the realization that there must be a connection between the content and the process of teacher education and the needs and concerns of the schools.

Recommendations Into Action

The opportunity to follow reform advice came in 1990 when representatives of six school districts from East Multnomah County in Portland, Oregon approached faculty at Portland State University with concerns for their teachers and students and an interest in cooperative programs. It was the genesis of collaborative reflection and inquiry for members of the university and school districts. Together they developed a preservice and inservice model, "Classrooms As Families." The program model addressed their mutual concern for the increasing number of students "at risk" and the lack of preparation for teachers to meet their needs, thereby creating an increasing number of teachers "at risk."

This study describes two phases of the collaborative

planning of a professional development center for teaching and teacher education. The planning process was conducted in a framework of a reflective inquiry approach. One focus for this phase was recognition of the discrepancies between the content of university courses and practices observed in classrooms. These discrepancies were even more critical when considered in the context of teachers not being prepared to meet the changing needs of students in the six school districts.

Direction For Studying Collaboration

To study the planning process, the initial research objectives were: to describe responses to the discrepancies of the participant groups (university faculty, classroom teachers, and school administrators), and to describe changes in teacher preparation which emerged from the collaborative inquiry process.

Literature Perspectives for Collaborative Planning

The collaborative inquiry used in the planning process of this study emerged from research-based concerns about teacher socialization during field experiences and a discontent with persistent flaws in the preparation of teachers. In addition, descriptions of professional development centers guided the process. The literature on reflective practice directed the process of inquiry.

Dissonance Between Preparation and Practice

The well documented dichotomy of university and public school values and methods has been a long term problem for

preservice education programs (Bean & Zulich, 1989) and one which has not been addressed directly. Preservice teachers are frequently confronted with disparate theoretical frameworks and conflicting models of teaching (Cherland, 1989; Zeichner & Liston, 1987; Evertson, 1990). The resulting socialization of preservice teachers has been suggested to have potential for "miseducation" (Evertson, 1990), a time of "pedagogical schizophrenia" (Templin, 1979); and a negation of the content of university course work (Zeichner, 1980; Tabachnick, 1980; Evertson, 1990). There is a long tradition of concern for and commitment to field-based teacher education. Recent reforms call for both alternatives and extensions of classroom experiences for preservice teachers. The problems however are visible and demand increased attention. Analysis of the discrepancies between teacher education content and classroom practice is long overdue. It was a timely focus for the planning process of this study.

Professional Development Centers

Concerns about the effect of field experiences and the continuing educational reform movement have promoted the concept of a professional development center or school. The professional development center model reflects major adjustments in the definitions of teaching, teacher education and teachers. The centers are designed to be cooperatively established and maintained by university schools of education and public schools, and to provide a site for mutual

deliberations on problems and possible solutions (Holmes, 1986). Three major purposes direct the development of a professional development center: the improvement of teacher education; improvement of teaching knowledge and practice; and improvement of the status of teaching (Sedlak, 1987). Professional development centers are conceptualized as a context for all teachers to learn more about teaching (Kennedy, 1989). Those purposes and the recommended characteristics of a professional development center provided a context for the inquiry process in this study.

Reflective Practice

The literature describing reflection and reflective practice guided the collaboration and inquiry described in this study. Reflection as "a way of thinking about educational matters that involves the ability to make choices and to assume responsibility for those choices" (Goodman, 1984; Zeichner & Liston, 1987) begins with recognition of an educational dilemma. A universal dilemma for the collaborative reflection and inquiry of this study was the discrepancies between the content of university course work and practices observed in classrooms. The specific dilemma for this group of educators was the lack of preparation for teachers to meet changing needs of children and families in the East Multnomah County school districts. Responses to both dilemmas were encouraged within the guidelines of multiple perspectives and integration of theory and practice. Solutions to the dilemmas were developed in the context of planning a teacher education program.

This study emerged from immediate concerns for the preparation of teachers to meet the needs of a changing population of students in a particular community. The characteristics of the students and their community were not unique to the East Multnomah County area; they describe the children for whom schools nationwide are "at risk" of failure to teach. Other global concerns were prompted by investigations of the effects of field experiences on preservice teachers and by persistent discontent with improvements in teaching and teacher education. They were a catalyst for the process studied here. Recommendations for professional development centers guided the collaboration between university and public school representatives, and reflective practice structured the inquiry and planning processes.

Methodology For Studying The Planning Process

The methodology for studying the collaborative planning process was a qualitative approach. Data sources were narrative recordings of planning and review sessions, collections of planning materials and resulting program descriptions, and participant journals. Two themes guided the descriptive analysis: the dissonance between teacher education and teaching; and preparation of teachers to respond to the changing population of children and families.

Reflection And Inquiry: Phase I

Participants in the first phase of collaboration

were a sample group of eight school district and school administrators and eight university faculty representing three departments in the School of Education. The group met monthly for a year to discuss the dilemma faced by teachers in the districts, that is, meeting the needs of a changing population of students and families. From there, the group proceeded to review literature on teacher education and children "at risk" of not succeeding in school.

Results from a previous year-long study of discrepancies between content taught in university courses and practices observed in classroom settings (Driscoll & Nagel, 1992; Nagel & Driscoll, 1992) provided a central dilemma for reflection in the latter part of this phase. Six categories of discrepancies were studied: planning, assessment, practice, grouping, classroom management, and teaching models. In the final session of this phase, the group met for two full days. Narratives of the sessions were recorded.

Reflection and Inquiry: Phase II

The participants for this phase were 18 classroom teachers, 2 administrators, and 4 university faculty representing the departments of Curriculum and Instruction, Special Education, Counseling, and Educational Administration. This group focused on the two dilemmas: discrepancies between the content of university courses and classroom practices observed by preservice teachers; and the changing population of students faced by teachers. For three months this group studied the literature on teacher education and students "at risk". This group expanded their

information about the first dilemma by conducting a survey of 120 of their colleagues about their preparation for teaching.

Narratives of the discussions and planning sessions of this group were recorded. In addition, each participant recorded their reflections in a journal for three months. Planning documents provided an additional data source. Portfolios of resulting recommendations, policies, course and program descriptions were developed. Individual interviews were conducted after the planning phase.

Qualitative research methodology was employed through content analysis of the data sources (journals, discussion narratives, interviews, and program recommendations) (Merriam, 1988; Miles & Huberman, 1984). Triangulation was accomplished by examining multiple data sources for consistency. The response narratives were analyzed for categories of differences and similarities for the participant groups, and for dominant themes of response. The related program recommendations were analyzed for categories of change and described in relation to responses to the dilemma.

Results

Responses To Reflection And Inquiry: Phase I

In the first phase of reflection and inquiry, data on the discrepancies between university course content and classroom practices provoked emotional responses of

irritation, blame, guilt, and mild agreement. When the participants, district and school administrators and university representatives, considered the discrepancies from perspectives of others, three common response themes emerged. First, most participants agreed that some of the categories of discrepancies, specifically teaching models, practice, and management, could be due to curricular overload in the schools, that discrepancies in planning could be due to constraints on teachers' time, and that discrepancies in assessment and grouping strategies could be attributed to a lack of preparation for teachers at both preservice and inservice levels. As discussion continued, participants began to consider the possibility that some discrepancies were inevitable, and not necessarily harmful. This became a second theme, as participants considered the possibility that some discrepancies should be acknowledged and analyzed in preservice courses and in inservice teacher education. At the same time, participants agreed that some categories of discrepancy were not considered advantageous. This became a third theme, and emerging recommendations addressed the need for careful selection of field placements to diminish the conflict for preservice teachers and to acknowledge effective practices of experienced teachers.

Recommendations for change at both preservice and inservice levels for university and school districts emerged from the collaborative inquiry process. They included:

1. School restructuring to provide more individual and group planning time for teachers;

2. An increase of curricular integration in classroom teaching and in teacher education course work.

3. Increased attention and resources for the development of assessment literacy and skills for both preservice and inservice teachers;

4. Increased and changed roles for classroom teachers in teacher education to include that of program planner, course instructor and inquiry/discussion participants.

The immediate plan of action which addressed the specific needs of teachers for the participating school districts was the development of a preservice and inservice program called, "Classrooms As Families." A recommendation for a program orientation which addressed the social and support needs of children, teachers, and families was the final outcome of this phase of reflection and inquiry. The participants also committed to provide resources and advisory assistance for the next phase of study and planning.

Reflection And Inquiry: Phase II

The participants in this phase, classroom teachers, administrators and university faculty, directed their reflection and inquiry to the actual planning of the "Classrooms As Families" teacher education program. Initial reflections focused on personal memories of preservice preparation and beginning teaching experiences, as well as current professional dilemmas of meeting the needs of a changing student population and a changing teacher role. As participants studied literature on teacher education, on

students" at risk" of not succeeding in school, and on current family structures and dynamics, their concerns expanded to more global issues.

The reflection and inquiry process demanded much more time than originally anticipated. The participants experienced the intensive time demands of true collaboration (Quinn, 1985), and many sessions extended beyond a weekly afternoon schedule to supper and evening sessions. The time demands also prompted a tension between proceeding with actual program planning and discussion of the dilemmas. The first recommendation emerged from that tension, and it was for ongoing and extensive communication between teacher education faculty and classroom practitioners. The planning moved toward a professional development center model with this recommendation.

From the program planning process, major recommendation themes were produced. These included the following:

1. Both university and school district faculties have a responsibility to provide models of those practices which preservice teachers need to learn. Preservice teachers must be able to observe effective teaching in university classrooms and in field placements.
2. The content of teacher education must be studied in an integrated format similar to the integrated unit design recommended for classroom teaching. Program orientation is to be modeled after the reflective inquiry process of the planning and the "Classrooms As Families" theme.

3. The content of teacher education should include increased study of family systems, communication, conflict resolution, and time and stress management. A major segment of the program must prepare teachers to work with students with special needs. In addition, the knowledge and skills required for participation in site-based management need to be addressed at both preservice and inservice levels.

In addition to the themes, specific structures for the group's ongoing collaboration in the preparation of teachers were described. Those included:

1. Participation of classroom teachers in the selection of cooperating teachers;
2. Participation of classroom teachers in teacher education admissions processes;
3. Extended participation of classroom practitioners in teacher education planning and implementation with such participation to include review and selection of textbooks and assignments for preservice teachers, ongoing program review and revision, and an increased role in the instruction of preservice teachers.

Additional Insights From The Study Process

Beyond the specific recommendations and changes in teacher education programming which emerged from the two phases of reflection and inquiry, several additional insights emerged from the study process. From all of the data

sources came a realization expressed consistently by the majority of participants. It was an understanding and appreciation of the complexity and magnitude of the process of teacher education. "Planning a program to prepare teachers is so much more than I ever imagined," and "We will never finish this." This awareness was accompanied by another, that of the enormity of the collaborative planning process and accompanying demands and accommodations of participants.

The second insight was that a recognition of the biases of past practice was important for collaborative efforts. There was a significant need for sensitivity to the history of relationships. A school administrator described the frequent concern of her classroom teachers who were participants in Phase II, "The university isn't going to go along with all our ideas; the program will get changed when we finish". In a final review session, the same administrator reported her teachers' incredulous response to the fact that "They (university faculty) are really going to implement the program just as we designed it." The success of collaborations can be diminished by biases of the past, so early work phases might include discussion of those sentiments and perceptions.

Significance of the Study Process and Findings

This study followed the advice of Goodlad (1990) so that the collaborative inquiry worked toward and accomplished both restructuring of public schools and redesign of teacher

education. As administrators and classroom teachers reviewed the discrepancies between what preservice teachers learned in university courses and what they observed in field placements, they reflected intensely on their practices. Administrators made decisions to restructure, to provide resources and time, and to generally support a number of practices which were absent in classroom teaching. As classroom teachers planned the teacher education program, they frequently discussed changes in practice, or plans to experiment with varied practices, and the intent to observe their own classroom dynamics. Teacher educators engaged in similar reflections and made similar decisions about their own teaching when faced with the query, "Do preservice teachers observe those practices in university instruction?". With these reflections and decisions came the foundation of a professional development center.

As the new teacher education program is implemented, with programming for both preservice and inservice teachers, it is expected that more insights and implications will emerge. In the meantime, there is an excitement and enthusiasm among the participants. There are promising extensions of the planning already visible. Those extensions represent the framework of a professional development center. Several examples illustrate their collaboration for ongoing improvement of practice. One example is the monthly meeting of a group of administrators and teacher education faculty, a breakfast gathering for ongoing discussion of teachers'

needs, of "Classrooms As Families", and of the impact of preservice teachers on schools. Another example is the work of a group of school district personnel (teachers and administrators) and teacher education faculty on the design of observational/feedback forms and assessment materials for the preservice program. Still another example is the working relationships developed between members of different university departments who have not traditionally collaborated to offer programs. Participants see the beginning of "promising and productive structural relations" (Holmes, 1986) between and within the university and public schools.

Through reflective and collaborative inquiry, both school personnel and university faculty became significant contributors to the professionalization of teaching. There is a well recognized pride and respect for the participants involved in the "Classrooms As Families" program. More significantly, both the university and the schools took on the responsibility of "establishing a climate of sharing, caring and learning" (Gonzales, 1990) for teachers and students.

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